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23 April 1964
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Science and Technology

SUBJECT: USAF Follow On Drone Program

1. As I mentioned to you in the morning roundup, we obtained some G-2 yesterday from Captain Dick Wilson, USN, and Bill Holcomb regarding a current expensive drone proposal which the Joint Staff is circulating for service comments at the request of the JCS. The due date for service replies to the Joint Chiefs is Tuesday, 27 April. Wilson, in effect, asked us what attitudes we thought the Navy should take regarding the soundness of this proposal. In other words, Wilson was suggesting that it would be possible for us to shape Navy's outcome, if we so desired. I told him that we would see if we could not formulate some pertinent questions which might enable all of us to see just how far USAF has gone in thinking the matter through.

2. Salient factors of the proposal are as follows:

a. The proposal calls for the purchase of 50 drones to be divided into five squadrons of ten drones each, supported by two C-141's modified for drone launch in each squadron. As an integral part of the operation there would be five mobile processing centers, one attached to each squadron, and capitalized

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b. The drone would feature a 2,000 NM range, altitude optimized from 72 kilofeet to 75 kilofeet with a maximum altitude capability of 80,000. It would be powered by a GE-1 jet engine with inlets mounted on top of the build with a critical mach number of .75. The payload provisions are for 350 lbs., and the total over-all weight of the entire weapons system is between 4100 and 4400 lbs. It is said to feature a low AR profile.

c. The camera system is said to be designed around a 24-inch focal length panoramic stereo with one-foot design resolution and

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NRO and USAF review(s) completed.

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a 5,000 ft. film supply. Apparently they are not firm on the camera manufacturer because the proposal mentions that the format would either be 70 millimeter or 9 x 34 inch.

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d. The proposal is also said to say that this system would be supplemental to the SR-71, that it is not designed for over-flights of Russia which, according to the PCP, satellites will cover. The system is said to be air recoverable and reusable and, based upon the North American proposal for this system which we have seen, it would probably be air snatched by a C-130 in the recovery zone. The NAA proposal also included use of the Hilde material which could account for the alleged reduced AR profile when combined with the overhead inlet system.

3. It is our understanding that this proposal has been through A FSC and AFLC, and also that Col. Steakley in the JRC is the prime mover within JCS circles in getting the program going. It is not clear whether this has been exposed to the NRO process, although it is hard to believe that anything of this magnitude has not been run by Gene Fubini, Harold Brown, and Brockway McMillan. There apparently is no mention made of the manner in which it would be funded, although the PCP calls for a total investment of [REDACTED] for the system, beginning with [REDACTED] in FY 66. The system is designed to be operational as early as 1967 and following, which, if true, would place it in rather direct competition with TAGBOARD. If you have any views on how we should handle this with the Navy, we would be happy to receive them. Paranthetically, I might add that it is interesting to note with what speed the Air Force can concoct multimillion dollar programs in the reconnaissance field with little or no consultation, when compared with the agonizing fashion with which we are obliged to work out arrangements with the Air Force on sophisticated systems we propose.

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JAMES A. CUNNINGHAM, JR.
Acting Assistant Director
(Special Activities)

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